

External Computer Hardware

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WHAT'S COVERED

When you are working with a computer, whether you are at home, school or work, you should be able to identify all of its key external components. It is also important that you have an understanding of what each external component's function is. In this tutorial we will cover the components commonly found on the outside of a computer system.

Our discussion breaks down as follows:

1. Outside of the PC (System Unit)

Although there are many different types of computers available, on a typical computer you will always find several components. The common exterior components are: buttons, CD/DVD-ROM drive, vents, ports, and status lights.

- **Buttons:** Every computer, regardless of type, will have some way in which to turn the system on. The power button on a computer is what turns it on. Depending on the computer type, you may also see buttons that adjust sound and screen settings, as well as a button to restart the computer. You may also see a button allowing a user to eject a disk.
- **CD/DVD-ROM Drive:** Many computers will have a minimum of one **CD/DVD-ROM drive** that can be used to insert, remove, or write (burn) CDs or DVDs. Some netbooks, such as Apple's Macbook Air, do not provide users with an installed CD/DVD drive.



CD/DVD-ROM Drive

- **Vents:** As a computer is being used, it is generating heat. To dissipate the heat generated, most computers will contain a fan and at least one externally located **vent** that cools down the electronic components of the computer.
- **Ports:** Computers provide **ports** for users to plug in cables and peripheral devices. The types of ports available depend on the age and type of the computer. Most ports are located on the back or front of a desktop PC, and on the side of a notebook PC. Typical ports include USB (keyboard, mouse, external drive), serial port, HDMI (monitor), modem or phone port, LAN or network port, and LPT port (printer).



USB port

- **Status Lights:** Many computers will provide a **status light(s)** to let the user know that the computer is powered on. Some computers will provide indicator lights to let a user know that information is being written to a disk or incoming audio is clipping.



Check out the video to learn more about these components.



CD/DVD-ROM Drive

Drive bay used to insert CDs and DVDs.

Vent

Provides external area for internally generated heat to be dissipated.

Ports

Areas into which device cables can be connected to the system unit.

Status Lights

Provide user with feedback as to the current operation of the system.

2. Peripheral Devices

A peripheral device is a system-related device that is not a native part of the computer system. Peripheral devices are typically connected to the system via a port. Peripherals can be categorized as input, output, or storage devices. Depending on the type of computer, some common peripheral devices are keyboards, pointing devices, scanners, digital cameras, monitors, and printers.

- **Keyboard:** All personal computers need components that allow the user to input data. **Keyboards** help

the user enter text or numbers as input for documents or files. Keyboards are available in different sizes. Some keyboards are designed for ergonomics while others are designed to be small.

- **Pointing Device:** A **pointing device** is an input device that moves an on-screen pointer and gives users the ability to click to initialize applications or open files. The most common type of pointing device is a **mouse**. Users move the mouse across a flat surface and press a button to click. Another type of pointing device is a **touchpad**. A touchpad is a touch-sensitive pad that is built into a notebook computer and is designed to behave like a mouse.
- **Scanner:** **Scanners** allow users to input documents into a computer, either as images or as text. Most scanners have flat surfaces on which users place documents to be scanned. However, some scanners feed documents one page at a time. Most scanners utilize the USB interface.



Document scanner

- **Digital Camera:** A **digital camera** is a device that captures a picture and converts it into digital information. Most digital cameras provide a local storage option until the picture can be transferred to a computer. Typically, a digital camera connects to a computer using the USB interface.
- **Monitor:** A **monitor** is a device used to display video, images, or text. With a laptop computer, the monitor is built-in. With a desktop computer, the monitor comes as a separate component connected to the system unit via cable (typically VGA). Most monitors are used only for output, but some, such as touchscreen monitors, can be used for both input and output.
- **Printer:** A **printer** is an output device that generates a hard copy of work created on a computer. All

printers do the same basic thing: they print an image on a page. A printer's resolution, cost, speed, and overall ability vary.



Learn more about the types of peripheral devices in the video below.



Keyboard

Device that provides text and/or numeric input into a computer system.

Pointing Device

Device that moves an on-screen pointer and provides buttons for input.

Mouse

A device that can be moved across a flat surface to move an on-screen pointer.

Touchpad

Touch-sensitive pad that behaves like a mouse and is built into laptop computers.

Scanner

Input device that allows users to input documents as images or text.

Digital Camera

Input device that captures a picture and converts it to digital information.

Monitor

Output device used to display video, images, and text.

Printer

Output device that generates a hard copy of work created on a computer.



Computers consist of a wide array of internal and external components. In this tutorial we covered the common external components and peripheral devices utilized by a computer system.

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Digital Camera

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Keyboard

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Monitor

Output device used to display video, images, and text.

Mouse

Device that can be moved across a flat surface to move an on-screen pointer.

Pointing Device

Device that moves an on-screen pointer and provides buttons for input.

Ports

Area into which device cables can be connected to the system unit.

Printer

Output device that generates a hard copy of work created on a computer.

Scanner

Input device that allows users to input documents as images or text.

Status Lights

Provide user with feedback as to the current operation with the system.

Touchpad

Touch sensitive pad that behaves like a mouse built into laptop computers.

Vent

Provides area for internally generated heat to be dissipated.